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Paulette Belin
SEIU 1199NE
Before the Human Services Committee

In Support of **SB 989 An Act Concerning Nursing Homes**

Good Afternoon Senator Lesser, Senator Hochadel, Representative Gilcrest, Representative Garibay, and Members of the Committee. My name is Paulette Belin, I live in Norwich, I am 58 years old and have been a Certified Nurses Aide (CNA) for 43 years. I come to you today as an advocate for myself, my co-workers, and our residents; and I urge you to pass SB 989.

I am a living testimony of the life of an understaffed and underpaid healthcare worker. I just returned to work from having back surgery. This job is physically, mentally, and emotionally draining with no support. This is what happens when companies are not held accountable for adequate staffing ratios, it leaves many of us broken and in pain. In the last 43 years I have seen such a drastic change in the nursing home industry, yet I have seen NO change in the State staffing patterns.

The public thinks that we take care of elderly residents with Alzheimer's & Dementia, but the truth is that it is a mixed population. Connecticut has closed one of the biggest Mental Health Institutions = Norwich State Hospital and those patients have gone to the streets and into nursing homes. We are also dealing with younger residents that have substance abuse issues and mental health illnesses. We are expected to care for these challenging residents without any proper training or in-services. Many days I have been tasked with caring for 22 residents alone. If a whole family cannot care for 1 person, please tell me how I am supposed to properly care for 22?

Staffing for nursing homes is quickly disappearing everyday. Nursing home workers have and continue to work through a pandemic with little to no compensation or recognition. Mandating takes place daily, and oftentimes we are forbidden to leave after our shifts to get our kids off the bus or care for our own family. There have been many days that I said I was not coming back, but then my resident with the cataract weakened eyes looks at me and whispers, "Thank you, I appreciate everything you do for me. I feel so bad that you girls have no help." That is what keeps me coming back.

I am caring for broken people, when I am broken and burnt out myself. Management never provides care or passes a pill, they should not be allowed to be counted into the staffing ratios. It is not an exaggeration to say nursing home workers have given their life to this industry. Many have died of Covid or brought Covid home to their family members who have died. Many have had car accidents driving to work through storms. The people we care for are important and deserve adequate staffing to meet their daily needs!

I urge the State of Connecticut, one of the richest states in the country, to take a look at their nursing home communities and its staff. We need to hold these companies accountable. I am asking the State to show its nursing home residents a little of the same love that the caregivers have shown this helpless community. For today this is their sick pillow, but tomorrow it could be yours or your loved one.

Thank you for your time,